DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 569 TM 820 734

AUTHOR Boruch, Robert F.
TITLE The Governance of the National Assessment of Educational Progress: A Brief Review and Some Options. Report No. A-158-5.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 31p.; For a related document, see ED 213 769.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Data Collection; *Educational Assessment; Educational Needs; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; Evaluation Needs; Federal Programs; Federal Regulation; *Governance; *Needs Assessment; Planning; *Policy Formation; Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS *National Assessment of Educational Progress; National Institute of Education

ABSTRACT

This report concerns the governance of the structure of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), especially the law and the role of the Assessment Policy Committee (APC). The major sources of evidence include interviews with APC members and National Institute of Education (NIE) staff, minutes of APC meetings and historical documents on NAEP, statutes, and field research on use of NAEP. Several options for change are suggested that involve minimal disruptions of current operations: (a) the categories of APC membership specified by law should include an expert in statistical research policy; (b) the APC should have direct, routine access to a senior NIE executive who is responsible for liaison with NAEP and for articulating and explaining NIE's agenda; (c) a formal mechanism for assuring that APC members are aware of new issues and ideas, apart from those provided by NAEP and NIE, needs to be created; and (d) the tension between NIE's research mission and the NAEP's traditional data collection mission needs to be resolved. Several options for a major change include those that focus more heavily on (a) research, (b) cooperative statistical systems and research, and (c) states. (Author/PN)

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ED222569

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AUTHOR: Robert F. Boruch
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois 60201

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REPORT NO.: A-158-5

PREPARED FOR: National Institute of Education

DATE: August, 1982

TM 820734

NOTE: This is a penultimate draft.

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1. Introduction

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was designed primarily to "detect current status and report changes in the educational attainments of young Americans." Over the past 13 years, the public, through the federal government, has invested over $70 million in this large-scale program of achievement testing program and in the distribution of results.

Under current law, federal funds for NAEP are awarded through competitive contracts or other funding mechanisms through the National Institute of Education. The Education Commission of the States, which has run NAEP since the survey began, received its most recent three year contract in 1979. NAEP operations are managed by a specialized group, hereafter designated NAEP management and staff, that is a part of the Education Commission of the States. Actual survey operations and technical work are subcontracted to other organizations such as the Research Triangle Institute.

1.1 The Focus of this Report

This report concerns the governance structure of the National Assessment, especially the law and the role of the Assessment Policy Committee (APC). In particular, we address the following question:

> What alternative governance structures...will allow (a) NAEP to deal analytically and evaluatively with contemporary educational issues and (b) minimize the changes that NAEP can become a federal tool leading to development of federal standards, curricula, and tests?

The question was framed by the National Institute of Education based on their responsibility to understand how NAEP can be operated better, whether any governance options would indeed improve operations or products,

whether any governance options would indeed improve operations or products, and the senses in which they might be better. The qualification on the question, concerning federal involvement, is important in some respects and trivial in others. It is also discussed in the following remarks. An immediate justification for posing the question is a review of NAEP by Wirtz and LaPointe (1982) that implied that the question is an important one.

This report relies on interviews with APC members, NIE staff, congressional staff and others, on the contents of documents such as minutes of the APC and the federal statute authorizing the Assessment, and on our own earlier research on the use of NAEP products (Sebring & Boruch, 1982).

1.2 Elements of the Current Governance Structure

Federal law (20 USC 1242) determines the governance structure of NAEP in a fundamental way. In brief, the Congress:

(a) makes the National Institute of Education responsible for carrying out the survey,

(b) provides that the survey be carried out through an education organization to whom funds are awarded for the purpose by NIE,

(c) provides that the education organization create an Assessment Policy Committee to govern its own operations.

The law itself and these three elements constitute the crude governance structure. It is peculiar, for the reasons discussed below.

The Institute Role

The NIE is required by law to "carry out" NAEP. As a matter of

practice, the phrase implies identifying and selecting a grantee for the work, assuring that the award process is a fair one, and assuring that the grantee is accountable in some sense.

The only further legislation specification of NIE's role is given in the section of law dealing with support of NAEP. The monies for conducting NAEP can be disbursed by NIE through "grant or cooperative agreement with a nonprofit education organization." The exclusion of the option to award contracts rather than grants can be interpreted reasonably as congressional interest in avoiding unnecessary federal influence on a national assessment.

Congress shifted control of NAEP monies from NCES to NIE in 1979. Before 1979, awards were made on the basis of cooperative agreements between NCES and the Education Commission of the States. That is, an essentially sole source grant has been awarded routinely. In 1979, NIE initiated efforts to put the process into a competitive grant framework more compatible with the practices of a research-oriented Institute and the peer review process that research awards engender. The single bidder at that time was ECS and it was awarded support for operations between 1980-83.

One reason for the shift in control from NCES to NIE appears to be specified partly in Senate Report 95-856. "The Committee (on Human Resources) has received numerous expressions of concerns from chief state school officers, state board members...that the National Center for Educational Statistics (has) shown a disregard and insensitivity to the fears of federal control of the programs...." There are other reasons for the shift; they are not specified in the Report.

The Education Organization

The law specifies very little about the education organization to which awards are made. The only requirements are that it:

(a) be nonprofit

(b) "be responsible for overall management of the National Assessment"

(c) "delegate authority "elsewhere to design and supervise the conduct of NAEP.

The Education Commission of the States has been the education organization since the inception of NAEP. A staff, directed by Roy Forbes, has taken responsibility for NAEP within ECS. The staff is aided considerably by consultants.

The Assessment Policy Committee

The law requires that the education organization responsible for overall management of NAEP delegate authority to an Assessment Policy Committee to "design and supervise the conduct of the National Assessment." The composition of the APC is also prescribed by law to include state legislators, classroom teachers, and other categories discussed below.

The arrangement is peculiar in that APC authority is indirect: the manager of the study delegates authority to a committee in whose selection the manager may play a role.

It is peculiar as well in that responsibility for creating the APC is not given to any federal agency. Again, the reason appears to lie in Senate Report on NAEP..."to make unmistakably clear the Committee's intent that the program is to be carried out with extensive involvement of the education community at the state and local levels."

1.3 Premises

This report is based on three major premises.

First, we believe changes in NAEP's governance structure are warranted only if such changes will improve the product, its usefulness, or the efficiency of its production. To put it bluntly, if the wheel is not broken, we should not attempt to fix it.

The basic NAEP products are statistical data on academic achievement and the distribution of statistical results. Secondary products, not expected early in NAEP's development but important nonetheless, appear to be considerable technical and nontechnical assistance to state and often local education agencies with responsibility for monitoring educational progress. Other products are possible and can enhance the utility of the basic product remarkably. But whether these can or should be produced is debatable.

The second premise is that the Congress' shift of control of NAEP monies from NCES to NIE can be regarded as an increased stress on a research orientation rather than just data collection. NIE is, after all, the federal agency responsible for basic research in education and a fair amount of applied work that is eventually exploited at local, state, and federal levels. In part, the research perspective is reflected in this report's topic. There were in fact other reasons, concerning governance, for the shift in control from NCES to NIE. They are considered in the following remarks only in the context of relations between the federal government and the NAEP operation.

The third premise is a recognition that NAEP has developed, over the past 15 years, from an idea to a stable and informative device for monitoring achievement. It is remarkable in this respect, and the evidence on its

use, if not utility, is ample. Still, recent reports and criticism of NAEP provide an opportunity for review and perhaps innovation.

2. The Law and Structure

The law itself is a source of tension as well as a source of opportunity in NAEP governance. There are discrepancies as well as concordance between what the law prescribes and what actually happens.

2.1 The Law as a Fundamental Source of Tension and of Opportunity

The letter of the law specifies that

(a) NIE "shall carry out" NAEP;

(b) the education organization through which this is done "shall be responsible for overall management of the National Assessment;"

(c) the "Assessment Policy Committee (will) design and supervise the conduct of the National Assessment."

The language of the law does not help one to understand where the limits of authority lie. Its lack of clarity is likely to be one cause of tensions among federal agencies responsible for NAEP and the education organization responsible for management and the APC responsible for design and supervision.

At Worst At its worst, the law can be regarded as creating a fiefdom with three masters, each jealously guarding their powers. It is an untidy arrangement to judge from squabbles between NAEP and the federal government. But the constitutional form of legitimated mistrust has worked in other quarters for two hundred years. The form invented for NAEP does work in limited ways too.

At Best At its best, the dispersal of authority can be regarded as an opportunity for better collaboration among individuals with an interest in American education. To judge from the comments of Assessment Policy Committee members, the system works in this respect too, at least up to a point.

2.2 Responsibility versus Capability of the Assessment Policy Committee

The APC is required by law to be responsible for tasks with which members cannot possibly deal directly.

To judge from the minutes of APC meetings and from interviews, the topics that receive most attention from the APC and that are compatible with the law's requirements involve choice of substantive areas for testing (including target sample characteristics such as age group) and the NAEP budget. The serious attention given to these areas is clear.

There are excursions into other topical areas but these are much less intense and less uniform and predictable. Many ACP meetings, for example, involve merely providing information by NAEP staff rather than formal policy decisions, e.g. discussion of press coverage of a particular survey.

Other areas that are denominated in the law receive far less attention than testing areas and budget. More important, these areas are very complex. Making the APC "responsible" for them in the law seems gratuitous at best.

For example, the law says that the APC is "responsible" for the development and selection of goal statements and assessment items, the assessment methodology, the form and the content of the reporting and the dissemination of assessment results, and studies to evaluate and improve the form and utilization of NAEP" (Paragraph D3 Section 405). It is difficult to see how responsibility for these tasks can be taken, other than superficially, simply because the APC is not composed of experts in these areas. More important, selection of goal statements, test items and the like are simply not "policy" issues, as the phrase is generally used.

For example, no members of APCs have played a sufficiently major role

in designing utilization studies or evaluations of NAEP to be acknowledged in published reports of those studies. At best, they have provided reactions to NAEP staff suggestions, and perhaps even influenced a choice to pursue one of several options. No members of APC appear to have done research on dissemination or on goal statements and test items that is sufficiently intensive to be reported in scholarly journals. Again, at best they may provide reactions to NAEP management and staff.

The problem of discrepancy of course does not lie with the APC. Part of the problem lies in law that asks individuals to take responsibility for matters that lie beyond their ken, matters for which even if individuals did have the pertinent expertise, time alone would not permit serious responsibility. Part of the problem of course also lies in the ambiguity of the word "responsibility" as it's used in the law.

Options

The options for change here include:

1. Defining responsibility so as to mean only oversight guided by questions that are properly policy.
2. Narrowing responsibility to focus attention only in broad areas with which the APC is best able to deal, notably learning areas, budget and, more important, broad policy bearing on better exploitation of NAEP.
3. Changing the APC composition, budget structure, and operations to match between responsibility and capacity.

2.3 The NAEP - Federal Linkage

The National Institute of Education is responsible, under the law, for carrying out "by grant to or cooperative agreement...with a nonprofit educa-

tion organization, a National Assessment of Educational Progress...The education organization through which the Institute carries out the Assessment shall be responsible for overall management of the Assessment" (Sec. 1242, Section 405 of the General Education Provisions Act"). This prose leaves a fair amount of leeway for relations between NIE and other parts of the governance structure - NAEP management and staff and the APC.

There is a source of tension in those relations that does not seem necessary or productive. It turns around the view of at least some APC members that NIE policy on NAEP is not clear. Specific questions that members posed during my conversations included:

- What is NIE's agenda for NAEP and how is it to be constructed?
- Why has NIE chosen to open the award process to competitive bidding?
- Why has NIE emphasized production of
    - Public use data tapes
    - Issue papers

when budgets have not been adequate, APC members maintain, to produce the data that is needed. Part of the tension appears to stem from the fact that the APC is not informed about the rationale for NIE action or the sources of pressure and responsibility that imply action must be taken.

For instance, the law requires that NIE's Director be an ex-officio member of the Assessment Policy Committee. This is the only formal channel for communicating federal interests to the APC and vice versa. It is an inadequate one simply because the turnover in NIE Directors is high: most last less than two years in their position. The same problem affects the development of coherent NIE policy on policy on NAEP.

Explanations that address the more specific questions have indeed been addressed by NIE staff, to judge from minutes of APC meetings. Still, it appears that better explanation would help. The fact that public use data tapes were promised by NAEP over five years ago, but were not delivered is important and does not seem to have been taken into account in criticism of the Institute.

A second more generic source of tension is that NIE is a research support Institute. Unlike NCES, it is not an agency for routine collection of data. The research orientation implies that NIE staff will be strongly interested as they should be in new ideas, bearing on the use of NAEP for instance, the different directions NAEP could take, and so on. The responsibility for NAEP is then misplaced unless either NAEP becomes more research oriented or the mission of NIE is broadened. The latter seems silly in that NCES has had responsibility for general education surveys.

3. APC Operations

The time available for the APC to consider issues has been considered by some critics to be inadequate. The APC's normal access to information seems at least as important. Both are considered here briefly, since they are influenced by law.

3.1 Time and APC Responsibility

APC members may, under current law, serve for three years and can serve for no more than two consecutive terms. Members are asked to meet three times each year under current by-laws, with meetings typically being a day and a half or two days duration.

To judge from interviews with APC members, they regard their terms and

time available as adequate for the kinds of issues they are asked to address, but some would prefer more time. In particular, the time is viewed as adequate for broad policy choices. More time is warranted to the extent that the Committee is asked to or prefers to dig deeper into issues.

It is not clear that changes in structure of governance should be made to affect duration of terms, frequency of meetings, and the like. In particular, the APC itself seems the most appropriate body to lay out frequency and duration of meetings. Outside mandates are likely to be gratuitous. In any case, frequency and duration are matters of APC by-laws rather than statute or federal regulation.

Proper term of office is as debatable here as in other cases of appointments to government advisory committees. It is a matter of law and therefore changeable. No remarkable reasons for change, however, surfaced during this study.

Some changes that could be justified are applicable only if the product or its production are deemed unsatisfactory in a few respects. For example, if the language of the law is subscribed to vigorously, then longer terms for some members may be warranted in the interest of stability; shorter terms for others warranted in the interest of freshness. Changing by-laws, however, to meet this contingency seems more practical than changing law.

3.2 Augmenting APC Capacity

The capacity of the APC to deal with issues is influenced partly by its willingness and capacity to seek assistance. The APC has generally relied on (a) NAEP staff, (b) Technical Advisory Boards, and (c) periodically on outsiders.

The APC relies heavily for its information on NAEP management and staff, to judge from minutes of APC meetings and interviews with APC members. However, NAEP management and staff have been willing at times to assure that the APC is presented with reports from outside the NAEP structure. More important, NAEP management and staff have provided the APC with access to information that is not always complimentary. NAEP Director Roy Forbes, for example, invited Archie LaPointe to report preliminary results of the Wirtz-LaPointe review of NAEP to full committee in 1981.

None of the APC members to whom we spoke were dissatisfied with the information provided by NAEP management and staff or of advisory committees. On the contrary, there was a fair amount of praise for each. This does not mean the APC has always been in accord with opinions of NAEP management and staff - there have been disagreements. But the endorsement is strong.

Despite this, there is no real guarantee that fundamental criticism will surface and receive a fair hearing from the APC, that fundamental questions about NAEP will be addressed, or that options other than those thought suitable by NAEP management and staff will be considered or recognized. Hearings before House Committee on Education in 1977 make it plain that the APC is "expected" to seek out advice of experts in educational research, higher education and statistics, presumably in these matters and others.

The underexploited source of information involves outside expertise. During interviews with APC members, some acknowledged that indeed they do not know the area of educational statistics well enough to know where to seek independent counsel. Others maintained that the organizations they represent were the only source of independent counsel they need. (In independently checking one of these organizations, it became clear to this writer at least that no member had contributed remarkably to educational

statistics or research policy or methods.) Money that NIE had allocated to independent consultants for the APC has gone unused; indeed one member failed entirely to remember it during a telephone interview.

The need to augment APC capacity, through law or other mechanisms, then is ambiguous. APC members generally praise NAEP and NAEP conferences as an information source. And for routine data collection these sources are likely to be sufficient. It is arguable then that augmentation is unnecessary.

The arguments <u>for</u> augmentation are that predicated on the beliefs that (1) the APC should consider new ideas for NAEP and (2) new ideas stem from outside the NAEP management staff, conferences, and support system. NAEP does exploit a great many consultants responsible for production of technical ideas. Still, it is a legitimate argument, and evidence that new ideas do not have sufficient opportunity to emerge are given later.

3.3 Assessment Policy Committee Size and Composition

Current law requires that the APC be composed of

- two representatives of business and industry
- two representatives of the general public
- one chief state school officer
- two state legislators
- two school superintendents
- one chairman of a state board of education
- one chairman of a local school board
- one governor of a state
- four classroom teachers

The director of the NIE serves as an ex-officio member.

Size

Though a 17 member committee appears to some observers to be large, therefore unwieldy or cumbersome, the APC members to whom we spoke seem satisfied with the arrangement. They maintain they do indeed work well together.

The size of the committee is inflated, of course, in the sense that it is rare to have all members present at a meeting. Further, the fact that governors (say) do not appear or send representatives may actually facilitate meetings.

I see no real grounds for changing number of APC members unless the APC's mission is altered greatly. Indeed, for this case as in many others in government or commercial enterprise, hard evidence on effectiveness of performance of committees, as a function of number of members, is non-existent. A greater or less number may improve the process or the product -- but no systematic administrative experimentation has been undertaken.

Composition

Composition of the Committee is a bit more interesting because the APC serves some unofficial missions as well as the ones required by statute. In particular, it is a symbol, a signal that local and state influence on NAEP must be strong. It is considerably more than symbol, in that APC members lobby vigorously, albeit often parochially, for those interests.

Within the ambit of law and symbol, this still leaves considerable room for improvement.

The categories listed in the law for instance virtually guarantee that very few, if any, will be knowledgeable about statistics, statistical management, statistical policy or educational research planning and policy. It can be regarded as distressing and absurd that despite 80 years of development

in survey sampling, 50 years of technical developments in experimentation, and 200 years in policy if we use the Census Bureau as a standard, the categories specified in the APC ignore them. This is frightening when we recognize that some $4 million per year are spent on a basically statistical enterprise that must be independent and related to others.

To push the point a bit further, consider that in interviewing APC members we encountered individuals who

- were unaware of the Condition of Education, a massive annual report that maps the statistical terrain, exploits NAEP;
- were unaware of the recent developments in federal statistical policy bearing on education or society more generally;
- were unaware of NIE's research mission and orientation, as distinct from NCES's data collection mission;
- were unaware of work on secondary analysis that justify production of public use data tapes;
- were unaware of the gratuitousness of uses of NAEP, in supporting arguments that Title 1 Compensatory Education programs work.

None of this should be surprising perhaps. It is alarming in that it suggests:

- no better forms of independence from federal influence will be outlined and examined seriously;
- no better arrangements to avoid redundancy with existing systems, to learn how NAEP interlocks with existing systems, etc. will be developed;
- no informed skepticism about uses of NAEP in making inferences or informed advocacy will prevail;

. no better ways of reconciling conservative approach that is essential to producing educational indicators with the possibility of small innovations that exploit NAEP better

Technical advisory group and technical advice does help to avoid some problems, if we judge from APC minutes. However, there is no reason to expect that individuals who are technically creative to be aware of major policy initiations bearing on statistics and educational research or to be interested in them.

Providing for a research policy specialist on the APC is no substitute for enlarging NAEP capabilities for research of course. That requires considerable funding and a change in NAEP's mission. However, it is likely to result in better exploitation of periodic opportunities to enlarge the value of NAEP and other work that is coupled to it.

3.4 The Questions That the APC Does and Does Not Address

The issues and choices presented for APC decisions are most frequently those raised by NAEP management and staff. Most are clearly important. The range of neglected issues is great.

To judge from APC minutes and interviews, the issues discussed at policy meetings are almost invariably those introduced by NAEP staff. The most regular topics include budget and choice of areas to be assessed. The irregular ones, deciding whether 9-year olds should be tested for example, are diverse. There is a great deal of reporting, e.g. on press coverage of a particular survey.

What features of this coverage invite criticism:

Federal Influence

To judge from the minutes, we can rely on one APC member every two years to announce rhetorically that NAEP will not be pushed around by the federal government. The spirit is proper we admit, if we turn to the law; it is specific in stressing state and local representation on the APC. The lack of any serious intellectual attention to the matter, however, offends common sense. In particular, never to our knowledge

(a) examined the extent to which alternative, systematic checks will keep federal influence tolerable,

(b) examined what "tolerable influence" is or should be,

(c) examined policy that would improve cooperation between federal and NAEP efforts without enhancing federal influence.

(d) policy that would better integrate and adjudicate the interests of local, state, and federal governments, for monitoring children's achievement, and especially to recognize incompetence and performance of some groups at each of these levels of government.

Evaluation of Schools and Programs. From time to time, the use of NAEP to evaluate programs is discussed by NAEP. The discussion is only occasionally illuminated by people who do know something about the difficulty or impossibility of this based on passive data generated by NAEP.

For instance, it was announced proudly at one APC meeting that NAEP data had been used in judging the worth of federally supported Title I programs. No questions arose about the legitimacy of the use, or the misleading character of the use. There was no recognition of any major criticism of such use. On the other hand, Ralph Tyler has been emphatic in taking the position at one meeting, probably more, that NAEP cannot be used to judge the worth of programs.

Similarly, an APC member at a recent meeting announced that the bottom 33% of achievement "represents a massive failure of the school system." No one seemed to recognize that (a) somebody will always be in the lower third of a distribution, (b) the statistic does not imply failure of a school system anymore than it implies failure of parents or the U.S. Government or society, (c) that the standards of evidence in evaluation of schools are not met by NAEP data, and so on.

Similarly, NAEP management reported on special studies to link achievement level data to state expenditures for education. Again, there was no recognition that the product of such effort does not permit one to make statements about how achievement is improved with expenditures. There was no recognition that the simple-minded strategy fosters the naive belief that throwing money at problems resolves them, an embarrassingly common approach in federal, state, and some commercial governance.

Study-wise Parochialism. NAEP is used often and in a variety of ways, to judge from our studies at the local and state level (Sebring and Boruch, 1982). It is underexploited in one major respect that has not been considered in any depth by the APC. The exploitation is a policy matter.

In particular, special studies that are adjoined or capitalized on NAEP should be a formal part of NAEP policy at the federal, state, and local levels, to inform debate over contemporary issues that cannot be addressed by NAEP alone. A mechanism for screening, supporting, and fostering collaboration in such studies should be developed.

Deuplication of NAEP for all or a major part of students within a state, rather than the usual small samples, illustrates the special study on a large scale. More small scale specialized efforts could be mounted, e.g., investigations of how NAEP test items match what teachers are trying to teach, or

academic research on science achievement based on NAEP data tapes. Such arrangements in principle augment NAEP's usefulness by permitting more capitalization on the basic sample, methods, structure, etc. of NAEP.

However, there is no coherent plan, policy or policy mechanism for encouraging special studies that exploit NAEP. Developing such policy seems sensible to foster utilization, because issues do emerge periodically and change, and NAEP can sometimes help address them. So, for example, there is no mechanism by which NAEP could be augmented by statewide randomized controlled tests of tuition tax credits, although the NAEP samples, administrative structure, tests, etc. are a vehicle for such tests. There is no research policy mechanism for exploring the technical issues that adjoining such a study raises. There is no management policy on screening for opportunities, no clear criteria for judging worth of studies that might be adjoined, and so on.

While this is relevant to federal influence, there is no reason why an expert APC and the states could not take a leadership role in this endeavor. In states where assessment offices have limited resources to do so, or in states (such as Texas) where independence of the LEA is valued, consortium arrangements among LEAs may be possible. Special studies might be conducted by anyone with the resources to do a good job, e.g. teachers or administrators, PTAs and school boards, academic institutions, etc.

Such arrangements in principle augment NAEP's usefulness by permitting more capitalization on the basic sample, methods, structure, etc. of NAEP.

One major justification for the view that policy on studies is far too provincial stems from NAEP's support. It is funded by law through the National Institute of Education. The NIE's mission is research. It must and should exploit research opportunities where they present themselves.

4. The Governance Structure Discussed by Wirtz and LaPointe

The Wirtz-LaPointe review of NAEP is pertinent to this report on governance in two respects. First, Wirtz and LaPointe raise the possibility of creating a council that would change the function and character of the APC or supplant it. They acknowledge that their discussion does go beyond their original mandate, and it discussion is very tentative.

Second, APC members raised the Wirtz-LaPointe report during interviews with this writer. Moreover, one thoughtful APC member suggested that the Wirtz-LaPointe observations on the APC constitute an opportunity for renewal and ought to be regarded as such.

Wirtz and LaPointe (1982) undertook no intensive study of the APC operations. They neither praised or criticized it directly. Rather, criticism was indirect in that they proposed an autonomous structure, called an Educational Assessment Council, that would have a more generalized mission than the current APC has. This Council would be responsible for policy and decision making (p. 49) and:

(a) consist of 6-8 "distinguished" individuals, including some educators

(b) meet frequently - 15 to 25 days each year

(c) maintain a staff of 3-4 professionals

(d) be "autonomous" and "independent"

It would be charged with:

(a) synthesizing and reporting information produced annually by "current educational measurement" because they say the public needs help "in interpreting the bewildering data" (p. 51).

(b) exercising "broad influence over the kinds of specific assessments that are made," a task that does not differ from current APC responsibility.

The Wirtz-LaPointe suggestion is compatible in some respects with remarks made earlier in this report. It is immaterial or incompatible in other respects.

Compatibility

The compatibility appears in four respects:

First, there does appear tc be a need for more independence of an advisory or control committee, to avoid almost exclusive reliance on NAEP management or any vested interest, and to avoid the discontinuity in APC oversight that is likely to be engendered by competitive bidding on contracts that may lead to agencies other than ECS conducting NAEP.

Second, there is a need for additional expertise on such committees.

Third, there is a need for more frequent meetings if the committees' mission is broadened.

Fourth, Wirtz and Associates stress the need for a committee to exercise broad "influence on the kinds of specific assessments...undertaken" (p. 51). This too seems sensible based on the remarks earlier in this report.

This compatibility does not mean that this report sustains the tentative recommendation of Wirtz and LaPointe for an educational Council. It merely reiterates some of the concerns implied by Wirtz and LaPointe.

Incompatibility

The lack of compatibility between Wirtz-LaPointe and this report lies in one area.

Wirtz and Associates maintain that we need to find ways to summarize the "considerable amounts of data (that) emerge each year" (p. 49). In fact,

(a) a system for summarization does indeed exist, and is used,

(b) though the system is flawed, it is remarkable for its quality, catholicity, and coverage.

This system consists mainly of annual reports issued by the National Center for Educational Statistics under the title Condition of Education. It does, with a small staff, a major task Wirtz et al. want their Council to do; present reliable data and facilitate interpretation with prose that summarizes its meaning. This system has been criticized both well and badly, though Wirtz-LaPointe do not seem to recognize this (Wohlstetter and Boruch, 1981). Both types of criticism are publicly available, and action has been taken on at least some of the latter by NCES. Wirtz and LaPointe admire "responsible" reporting (p. 51), and indeed CE is supposed to be a balanced report under the law. It is, by and large.

The Condition of Education system does not, however, involve the "distinguished" contributors that Wirtz and LaPointe prefer. Rather, the producers are federal government staffers, statisticians, and educational researchers whose work is known in expert circles but who are not particularly visible at the national level. Moreover, the system does not discuss, create, or evaluate policy as a council might do. Rather its purpose is to inform, without editorializing by and large, national and state educational policy.

5. Summary

This report reviews the possible need for structural changes in governance of NAEP and the changes that can be regarded as options. Governance here includes law and the major administrative components of NAEP, such as the Assessment Policy Committee. The report was requested by NIE, partly because there have been no inquiries of a similar kind despite the importance of NAEP's governance and because an opportunity for review has been created by recent studies of the usefulness of NAEP. The major sources of evidence here include interviews with APC members and NIE staff, minutes of APC meetings and historical documents on NAEP, statutes, and field research on use of NAEP.

If the traditional products of NAEP are regarded as satisfactory, major changes in governance are not likely to be productive. The system works sufficiently well to produce (a) reliable data on children's achievement, (b) occasionally interpretations, (c) de facto technical education for the states, and consequently we ought to view major change with caution.

The traditional products of NAEP are less satisfying if one's criterion includes serious consideration of innovation (aside from sampling, testing, and public relations) and more productive relations among the federal government, NAEP, and their constituencies. In particular, new opportunities to learn how to exploit data better or more cheaply are not pursued as often as they can be. The constraints here include budget, of course. But some aspects of governance are important too.

Some options suggested or implied by critics of NAEP do not appear necessary. Changing the number of APC members seems unnecessary in that APC members are satisfied with the size and no major justification apart

from budget is evident. Changing the frequency and duration of meetings is the province of the APC and NAEP management, not of law or administrative directive of NIE.

Several options exist for change that involve minimal disruption of current operations, do not engender any notable increase in federal influence, and open the NAEP system a bit to new ideas.

(a) First, the categories of APC membership specified by law should include an expert in statistical research policy; the absence of such a category in law is outlandish and fosters parochialism. No APC members are recognized experts in this arena; technical advisory groups are not substitute for membership.

(b) Second, the APC should have direct, routine access to a senior NIE exexutive who is responsible for liaison with NAEP and for articulating and explaining NIE's agenda. The current ex-officio membership of the NIE director is not satisfactory simply because political appointments are so transient.

(c) Third, some formal mechanism for assuring that APC members are aware of new issues and ideas, apart from those provided by NAEP and NIE needs to be created.

(d) Fourth, the tension between NIE's research mission and the NAEP's traditionally data collection mission needs to be resolved. Developing formal policy to exploit NAEP as a vehicle for research, as a target of research, as a producer of data that occasionally will be useful for legitimate research may be one way of removing some tension and, more important, developing more cooperation among federal, state, and local interests in NAEP.

Several options for major change are worth considering, but they are predicated on assumptions about what NAEP should be that are different from prevailing assumptions. The changes are not likely to be warranted or even feasible unless the assumptions are studied more intensively than they have been. They can be summarized into those that focus more heavily on (a) research, (b) cooperative statistical systems and research, and (c) states.

If NAEP is regarded as a legitimate vehicle for research, as well as being regarded a monitoring system, then a variety of major changes seem worth considering. None can be done quickly, nor should they be implemented without discussion and pilot testing.

The language of the law must be changed to authorize and emphasize using NAEP as a periodic vehicle for research on contemporary problems, and to include relevant research expertise on the Assessment Policy Committee. The federal government's relation to NAEP must be altered to permit routine, serious consideration of research proposals by recognized experts.

Some of the arguments for such a major change in NAEP emphasis, though not direction, are negative, e.g. to avoid parochialism, stoginess, and lack of imagination that characterize many stable statistical systems and to reduce overblown or misleading claims about what such passive systems can do. The positive arguments include the idea that NAEP is a national resource that ought to be exploited more effectively, and moreover that adjoining research projects periodically to NAEP is a device for better exploitation and utilization.

The clear arguments against such change are complexity and cost. The debatable arguments include possible politicization of NAEP, politicization that can have either negative or positive benefits.

If NAEP is regarded as a small but legitimate part of a large fragmented network of independent local, state, and federal data collection efforts, then major efforts to identify its role are better warranted. It is not clear that major changes in governance are warranted to do this. Rather the task might be accomplished well by creating a liaison committee with each federal agency responsible for research and statistics production, a committee with responsibility for identifying why and how NAEP fits into other data collection efforts and for identifying opportunities to coordinate and collaborate.

If NAEP is regarded solely as a monitoring system and the primary objective is to market the system's products to a variety of changing constituencies, then options for structural change include focusing periodically on special audience categories. For example, state legislators are in principle a major audience for results, but it is far from clear that they are aware of NAEP. Even if they are aware, it is unclear that many would be competent to use the data thoughtfully. Some provision for periodic augmentation of the existing APC to direct attention to such audiences, to provoke their interest, provide them with technical assistance and so on is warranted. The creation of other advisory committees, to augment the APC, that are legislation oriented, administration oriented, etc. is conceivable. No new groups seem warranted without technical support however.

The arguments for alteration include the idea that an augmented APC or auxiliary committees can enhance utility of NAEP. The debatable arguments against alteration include the possible politicization of NAEP.

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